

VZCZCXRO0458

RR RUEHBZ RUEHJO RUEHMR RUEHBN
DE RUEHDU #0024/01 0641108
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 051108Z MAR 09
FM AMCONSUL DURBAN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1409
INFO RUCNSAD/SADC COLLECTIVE
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RUEHDU/AMCONSUL DURBAN 0782

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 DURBAN 000024

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

FOR AF/S, INR

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV SF

SUBJECT: POLITICAL PARTIES PLEDGE TO RESPECT ELECTORAL RULES IN KWAZULU NATAL, BUT BICKERING CONTINUES

REF: A. A) Durban 18;
 1B. B) 08 Durban 71

DURBAN 00000024 001.2 OF 002

11. (SBU) Summary: A round of verbal sparring by senior representatives of political parties in KwaZulu Natal (KZN) followed the signing of pledges to respect the Electoral Code of Conduct in the run-up to the April 22 general election. Although the proceedings remained civil overall, the adversarial comments by some party representatives raise questions about the sincerity of political parties' commitment to peaceful campaigning and controlling unruly supporters. End summary.

12. (U) Background and Introduction: The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) organized a large pledge signing event on March 3, held at Durban's International Convention Center. Provincial political party leaders, provincial and local government leaders, senior IEC officials, religious leaders and faith based community representatives, civil society representatives, party supporters and the media attended the event.

High-level Turnout

13. (U) Notable attendees included IEC Chairperson Dr. Brigalia Bam, IEC Deputy Chairperson Ms. Thoko Mpumlwana, IEC Deputy Chief Executive Officer Mr. Norman Du Plessis, KZN Premier Dr. Sibusiso Ndebele and members of his cabinet, KZN Provincial Government Director General Dr. Kwazi Mbanjwa, eThekweni Municipality Mayor Obed Mlaba, City Manager Dr. Michael Sutcliffe, Cardinal Wilfred Napier of the Roman Catholic Church, and SAPS Deputy Provincial Commissioner Fannie Masemola, who bemoaned the political intolerance in KZN, and noted the problems caused by "double-booking" of venues by parties in the province. Commissioner Masemola told the political parties that they must "behave" well, or otherwise the police will put them "behind bars." In later remarks, the DA representative Mike Ellis welcomed the SAPS' enforcement role but urged that SAPS apply the rules evenly to every party.

14. (U) Thirteen political parties participated in the pledge signing: African National Congress (ANC), Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), Democratic Alliance (DA), Congress of the People (COPE), Independent Democrats (ID), Freedom Front Plus, (VPF), National Democratic Convention (NADECO), South African Democratic Congress (SADECO), United Democratic Movement (UDM), African People's Convention (APC), Minority Front (MF), Africa Christian Democratic Party (ACDP), and Women Forward (WF). Eighteen parties will contest elections in KZN province.

IEC Reports Record Registration, Improved Processes

15. (U) Dr. Bam told the gathering that of 154 parties that earlier stated intentions to contest the election, only 41 confirmed participation by the IEC deadline. She reported that 23.1 million South Africans registered to vote and 27 percent of that number represents young people between 18 and 29 years. In KZN, the number of registered voters increased in 2009 to over 4.4 million, from 3.4 million in 2004.

16. (U) Dr. Bam explained changes to electoral procedures designed to promote transparency and inspire confidence in the results. To improve access to polling stations, the IEC will set up more stations. Party agents will witness vote tallies and see the results sheets at polling stations, and the IEC will scan the result sheets in every voting station to prevent manipulation. The IEC will make the full voters roll available electronically by zip drive at every station for use by party agents to verify the registration of voters not appearing in polling station lists. Dr. Bam also noted that presiding officers are not permitted to hold positions in political parties or in unions in alliance with political parties. She indicated that in future only professionals will be employed as presiding officers, to avoid conflict of interest.

17. (U) Mr. Du Plessis confirmed the IEC's readiness for the election. He emphasized the importance of political parties in the election process and encouraged them to cooperate with the IEC. He stressed the critical role played by party agents and encouraged parties to be widely represented at the polling stations by well-prepared agents. Party agents will be allowed to observe the sealing of the ballot box, scrutinize voters roll, and sign the final result sheet, he noted.

Remarks Betray Lingering Tensions, Animosity

18. (SBU) All political parties present signed the pledge and committed to observe the code of conduct during and after the election. In relatively short speeches following the signing

DURBAN 00000024 002.2 OF 002

ceremony, many party leaders called for political tolerance and an end to no-go areas, and decried other actions such as tearing down campaign posters.

19. (SBU) One of the early speakers, ANC Provincial Chairperson Dr. Zweli Mkhize, included in his remarks a specific criticism of the IFP for using violence to block the ANC from campaigning in areas such as Nongoma, Ulundi, Estcourt and Nseleni. Dr. Mkhize's attack on the IFP was unexpected, and uncharacteristic: he rapidly read through a prepared text, lacking his usual ease and charisma in delivery. He was the first speaker to make a swipe against another party. Not surprisingly, a few others followed suit.

110. (SBU) COPE's Nkosinathi Mkhize accused the ANC of disrupting COPE's meetings in Verulam, Inanda, and Howick. Mr. Mkhize called the ANC an "organized criminal gang" masquerading as a political party. Mr. Mkhize's counter-attack on the ANC brought jeers from ANC supporters. IFP's Zanele kaMagwaza Msibi said that although she could understand why COPE responded as it did, she would not respond directly to Dr. Mkhize's accusations. She focused on the importance of adhering to the Code of Conduct but did comment that Dr. Mkhize's remarks appeared to violate the Code, which prohibits using language in a way that may provoke intimidation of candidates, member of parties, representatives or supporters of parties or candidates, or voters.

111. (SBU) Echoing the frustration over lack of media access akin to that exhibited by the members of the Azanian People's Organization (AZAPO) who raucously disrupted a pre-election debate hosted by the national broadcaster on February 23, representatives of some smaller parties went well beyond the allotted "two minutes" to describe party priorities and rant about their political opponents, and were escorted off the podium by the IEC organizers. The APC representative also responded to the ANC attack and voiced solidarity with IFP, noting that IFP colleagues were extremely collegial and

hospitable when the APC organized meetings in Nongoma.

¶12. (SBU) Comment. A representative of the South African Muslim Network who attended the IEC event shared with CG a view we have heard from several sources in the wake of recent incidents in KZN attributed to political violence -- that many attacks arise from criminal causes and personal grudges rather than political rivalry. No one with whom we've spoken expects a return to the extreme political violence that KZN suffered in the past. Yet, tensions between COPE and the ANC, and the ANC and IFP, continue in KwaZulu Natal. The verbal sparring that took place at the IEC event demonstrated a lack of commitment to the spirit of the pledge the parties had just signed, and did not inspire confidence that political leaders are serious about addressing violent actions by party supporters.

DERDERIAN